

**Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind
Public Forum Minutes
August 11, 2005**

The Public Forum, held at the Downtown Radisson Hotel, Kansas City, was called to order at 7:00 p.m. The Council members introduced themselves. Those present were:

James Pelfrey, Abby Pffererkorn, Clay Berry, Lawrence Luck, Russell McCampbell, April Toolooze, Ceil Callahan, Beverly Kaskadden, Bill Burris, Ruby Polk.

Also present were Mark Laird, Mike Merrick and Daniel Nellis.

Russell McCampbell made a special announcement commending Sheila Wright for past work and her efforts on behalf of the Council.

A client, who had applied to Missouri Rehabilitation Services for the Blind a year and a half ago, complimented the agency on its efforts and support. One of her problems was that after preparing for her school's version of Jeopardy, she was never called on for participation and felt discriminated against.

She raised an issue regarding her experience in classes through Maplewood College's Access Program. Classroom presentations are projected onto a white background creating difficulties for low-vision individuals.

She had to rely on note-takers for her classes. Without assistive technology and because their handwriting was often illegible, it was only because her husband's reading for her that she was

able to complete the semester just a few points short of receiving an ‘A’ grade.

One of the Council members commended her for her accomplishments and suggested that she obtain electronics that would assist her in note-taking during classes.

Another Council member advised that she ask her instructor if his notes were published on the Web and could be downloaded. It was also suggested that she request the notes that the instructor used; they would probably already be typed and easier to read.

She stated that she had received the class handouts and thanked the Council for their suggestions.

The client stated that in order to qualify for services, she had to produce documentation about her vision impairment and “had to go through a psychological test.” The sequence of events was:

- application for services,**
- enrollment and attendance in summer school without services from the Agency,**
- transmission of documents for certification of services,**
- a semester without attendance in school,**
- identified needs for equipment for delivery in December,**
- delivery of and training on equipment in February.**

Although she attended summer school, she didn’t receive any equipment until the spring semester. Without training on its use, she had to rely on her granddaughter’s assistance for the first seven weeks of that semester. A significant delay occurred

because the rehabilitation engineer who was supposed to evaluate her needs and make arrangements for equipment and programs broke his leg.

One of the Council members asked about the lag time between receipt of the equipment and training. It seems there was a substantial loss of time because there was no one to fill in while the rehab engineer was recovering.

A council member asked if there were reports or reviews of vendors available to counselors and clients regarding their ability to provide assistive technology in a timely manner. It was reported that the State is currently meeting with providers and reviewing policies to shorten the time-frame between identifying client needs and acquisition of equipment. There was also some discussion regarding the loan of equipment by each office and by Missouri's Assistive Technology Program. It was suggested that it would be inadvisable to stockpile equipment because it is outdated so rapidly. However, the State Office will be looking at re-acquiring equipment that is no longer actively used and reassigning it.

Discussion followed about transition services. Students receive training and practice with equipment in their schools. This equipment belongs to and remains with the schools. The lack of adequate transition services results in a delay of providing students with appropriate and timely assistive technology.

A member of the audience expressed concern about the availability of Braille training to underserved segments of our population. The response was that Braille instruction is available to any individual who needed it and was qualified to receive it. It was recognized that although most people use technology, Braille provides a basic tool when that technology fails. Also, when someone with low vision has to address an

audience, Braille can be an important aid in the presentation of thoughts and ideas.

It was pointed out that vision can degrade over time making knowledge of Braille more important. It is easier to learn Braille at a younger age (i.e. from 6 to 10) then it is after age 18. If there is a possibility that clients will need Braille in the future, it would be better that they learn it sooner rather than later.

A consumer stated that he has been receiving services from a Career Center and from Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. His thought was that Career Center staff was reticent about working with him because he was receiving similar and more extensive services from Rehabilitation Services for the Blind.

Another consumer praised Rehabilitation Services for the Blind for the caliber of service they provided. She stated that the staff worked with her, recognized her when she phoned and demonstrated a high degree of professionalism.

The Forum adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

**Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind
Business Meeting
Friday, August 12, 2005**

The meeting was held at the Downtown Radisson Hotel in Kansas City and was called to order at 8:30 a.m. The roll call was as follows:

**Clay Berry, Donna Borgmeyer, Bill Burris, Ceil Callahan,
Michael Fester, Beverly Kaskadden, Lawrence Luck, Russell
McCampbell, James Pelfrey, Abby Pfefferkorn, Ruby Polk.**

The following Council members were not in attendance:

Debbie Head, Brian Wekamp, Stanley Grimsley, James Sucharski, Mary Kay Savage and April Toolooze.

Also present were Michael Merrick, Mark Laird, Rachel Labrado, Kathy Wright and Daniel Nellis.

The following guests were introduced - Gary Wunder, President of the Missouri Chapter of the Federation of the Blind and Dan Walker, C.E.O. of AlphaPointe.

Mr. Walker provided a brief introduction to AlphaPointe which employs 86 blind individuals and provides training and education to others. They also produce an array of plastic products.

Russ McCampbell made the following observation:

There are three areas of active interest in services for the blind - the Federal government and its commitment to the Workforce Investment Act, the state's activity manifested through the Review Commission, and community interests – making it a three legged stool on which rehabilitation services for the blind rest.

Reports from Kansas City Offices

Mark Laird introduced Kathy Wright from the Kansas City South Office. During her presentation, she stated that her combined district included metropolitan Kansas City and the rural counties. Her case load consisted of approximately 200 active cases and about 175 cases of services to the elderly blind (most of who are currently employed.) Her office is presently developing a training manual for reader/drivers. They are training staff to present information about their services to collateral agencies as well as to community groups. In

addition, they are attempting to generate interest among college students in acquiring graduate training in rehabilitation.

All services for children are initially screened through and served by the South Office. There approximately 40 children in their caseload. Once the appropriate service office has been identified, children who are 15-16 years old are referred there .

Rachel Labrado, the rehabilitation supervisor for the North Office, stated their staff includes two counselors with 160 cases. There are also 3 rehabilitation instructors who have a total of 260 cases. This district covers some inner-city Kansas City areas as well as Independence, MO and rural areas of 22 counties. She plans to redistribute the workload within the office and is considering redistributing the work load in the 22 counties based on roads, highways and accessibility.

Mrs. Labrado is working with the Career Centers to insure that services are adequate for use by the visually impaired. She has instructed her counselors to go with clients to assure that services and programs are available at the Career Office to which the client is being referred. They are also providing services within the Department of Corrections.

There was discussion between Council member and office supervisors about transportation problems experienced by clients. Individuals need to arrive on time for appointments and other events. In addition to bus service, there is share-fare. Clients are being advised to work out problems with the share-fare drivers and try to arrange for appropriate and timely pickups.

Clay Berry observed that the costs for transportation are frequently borne by the client prior to them being reimbursed. This then becomes a problem for individuals on limited

income. AlphaPointe has offered to advance transportation costs and get reimbursed as part of their services to the clients.

It was pointed out that the Kansas City transportation department is also involved in preparing and mailing a newsletter so that individuals may be apprised of upcoming changes which may affect them.

Career Center Update

Mike Merrick was asked to address concerns that Missouri Rehabilitation Services for the Blind has with the Career Centers. He indicated that it is imperative that Rehabilitation Services for the Blind provide training and transition services both for the Career Centers and for the clients. This will require that an ongoing relationship be established and fostered. Those Career Centers without adaptive equipment will be receiving it. Otherwise, the offices that currently have adaptive equipment will work with the disabled population. Again, he pointed out that it will be up to Rehabilitation Services for the Blind to work with the Career Centers to insure that clients receive adequate services and also that Career Center Counselors know how to serve disabled clients. There is a continuing effort within federal regulations to make this a viable operation to insure the successful integration of services.

Report on the Client Satisfaction Survey

Mike Merrick reported that 242 surveys have been sent out to individuals who have completed their rehabilitation program successfully. 260 questionnaires will be sent out in the near future to former clients who did not successfully complete the program. These two population groups have been separated because different questions are posed to clients who have

successfully completed their program and those who did not complete their program. The mail returns will come to the Jefferson City office and will be packaged and sent to Daniel Nellis for tabulation in St. Louis.

There was a suggestion to monitor the percentage of returns and if the numbers of responses falls below 20%, a card be mailed encouraging a response to the survey. All requests received by Daniel Nellis for telephone interviews will be tallied in with this group.

A motion was made by Lawrence Luck that if the survey response was below 20% within 30 days, a card be sent by Central Office to remind individuals to respond to the Satisfaction Questionnaire. It was seconded by Bill Burris. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting times and dates were discussed. A motion was made by Bill Burris that the meeting locations and dates be as follows:

Cape Girardeau on November 3 and 4, 2005

Columbia on February 2 and 3, 2006

St. Joseph on May 11 and 12, 2006

Joplin or Poplar Bluffs on August 3 and 4, 2006

Seconded by Lawrence Luck, the motion carried unanimously.

B.E.S.T Program

The Blindness Education Screening and Treatment program (Senate Bill 721, Statute 192.935) established this program in the Department of Health and Senior Services. This bill provides a check-off option for a \$2 donation to the program when Missourians obtain drivers licenses. The legislation reads as follows:

192.935.

1. There is hereby created in the state treasury the "Blindness Education, Screening and Treatment Program Fund". The fund shall consist of moneys donated pursuant to subsection 7 of section 301.020, RSMo, and subsection 3 of section 302.171, RSMo. Unexpended balances in the fund at the end of any fiscal year shall not be transferred to the general revenue fund or any other fund, the provisions of section 33.080, RSMo, to the contrary notwithstanding.

2. Subject to the availability of funds in the blindness education, screening and treatment program fund, the department shall develop a blindness education, screening and treatment program to provide blindness prevention education and to provide screening and treatment for persons who do not have adequate coverage for such services under a health benefit plan.

3. The program shall provide for:

(1) Public education about blindness and other eye conditions;

(2) Screenings and eye examinations to identify conditions that may cause blindness; and

(3) Treatment procedures necessary to prevent blindness.

4. The department may contract for program development with any department-approved nonprofit organization dealing with regional and community blindness education, eye donor and vision treatment services.

5. The department may adopt rules to prescribe eligibility requirements for the program.

6. No rule or portion of a rule promulgated pursuant to the authority of this section shall become effective unless it has been promulgated pursuant to the provisions of chapter 536, RSMo.

Karen Battjes, Unit Director, from the Department of Health and Senior Services presented this program and requested nominees to a Steering Committee. This committee may meet once in September; at that time recommendations can be made and may be acted upon.

A motion was made by Bill Burris and seconded by Ruby Polk that the Council support this ad hoc Steering Committee. After some discussion it was agreed that the Department of Special Education and providers of services be included and that, as much as possible, all scattered programs should result in a common entrance point for services.

Jim Pelfrey moved that Lawrence Luck and Clay Berry be appointed to serve on this committee. It was seconded by Bill Burris and carried by acclamation.

REPORT FROM MIKE FESTER

The Center for Braille and Narration located within the Department of Corrections is being expanded. They now have room due to program cuts and expect to double the size of this program.

Federal 107 Review on Program Performance

Mr. Fester reported that the reviewers noted that the State of Missouri ranks second in providing technology to its consumers and ranks fifth in earned hourly wages for its consumers.

It was also noted that the State is not capturing all the dollars to which it is entitled. Coding errors were made which kept Missouri from drawing down from federal funds for which it was eligible. This situation is immediately being corrected by working with the Division of Budget and Finance.

Mark Laird commented on the performance evaluation. He explained that the number of cases reviewed was increased 200%. The benefit of the process to RSB lies in focusing on issues specifically related to case activity. One of the reviewers complimented Rehabilitation Services for the Blind counselors for maintaining a high degree ('intensity') of contact with clients.

Mr. Laird stated that five task forces have been set up to make changes. These task forces are a direct result of feedback from the closure interview with Rehabilitation Services Administration and will correct any problems that may occur. He stated that he hoped that these kinds of interactions with the Rehabilitation Services Administration would continue.

Mr. Fester, who serves on the national committee overseeing the review feedback process, announced that he will be going to Washington, D.C. and will see what he can do to maintain high standards. Currently, regional staffs of the federal government are being dismantled; all future monitoring may be conducted from Washington, D.C.

Mr. Laird was asked to discuss the re-training program initiated prior to the review. Historically, counselors have performed well with clients on job retention and working with those who already had a job. However, counselors were not doing as well with those clients who were unemployed and had no training. A training module has been established to enable counselors to analyze, evaluate and develop viable vocational objectives and also to identify the steps needed to achieve the vocational objective.

He reported that all counselors in Missouri have received this training. Their feedback was positive. The next aspect of the training will be in job development and will intensify the involvement of counselors in placing individuals in job sites/locations. Training provides a focus and a standard of statewide uniform application of rules, regulations and good counseling techniques to the clients.

It was announced that Mike Fester has been appointed to represent the Department of Social Services on the Governor's Council on Disability.

A motion was made by John Wunder and seconded by Clay Berry that Denise Cross be sent a letter indicating the thanks of the Council for her assistance, support and personal attention to various Council members. The motion was unanimously carried.

Nomination of Officers –

The motion was made by John Wunder and seconded by Jim Pelfrey on the following slate of candidates:

Russ McCampbell for Chairman, Lawrence Luck for Vice-Chairman, Ruby Polk for Secretary/Treasurer

These officers were elected by acclamation

Nominations for the Executive Committee

Debby Head was nominated by Beverly Kaskadden and seconded by Ruby Polk, and Clay Berry was nominated by Bill Burris and seconded by Jim Pelfrey to serve on the Executive Committee.

These members were voted into office unanimously.

Abby Pfefferkorn moved to amend the by-laws concerning the election of officers and the number of terms that can be served. Her motion was seconded by Ruby Polk and carried by acclamation.

Lawrence Luck made a motion to approve the minutes of the May Business meeting which was seconded by Ruby Polk and Clay Berry. The minutes were approved as corrected.

The Chairman requested volunteers to work on the Annual Report with the Executive Director. The volunteers were Ruby Polk, James Pelfrey, Beverly Kaskadden and Debbie Head (by Executive appointment).

The Annual Report is to be developed in October and presented to the November meeting.

Policy Statement:

Mike Merrick presented a policy statement for competitive, integrated employment. It reads as follow:

RSB Definition of Competitive-Integrated Employment

Competitive-Integrated Employment Means:

1. The consumer must earn at least minimum wage, as defined by the Fair Labor Standards Act, but not less than the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by non-disabled workers.

2. An integrated setting for purposes of a job placement is one in which an applicant or eligible individual interacts with non-disabled persons, excluding service providers, to the same extent that a non-disabled worker in a comparable position typically found in the community interacts with others.

3. Interaction between individuals with disabilities and the general public need not be face to face in order to meet the standard. Self-employed, home based employees and telecommuters may interact regularly with the public through a variety of media, including telephone, facsimile and computer.

4. There is no set ratio of people with disabilities to non-disabled workers in the workforce that would by definition constitute an integrated work setting. Level of pay and benefits, while they are often measures of quality and consumer choice, do not determine whether a workplace meets the criteria for an integrated setting. Employment with any one employer does not automatically categorize that employment as either extended or competitive-integrated.

5. Determination as to whether any job meets the regulatory definition of competitive-integrated employment, and therefore qualifies as an “employment outcome” for purposes of the VR program, must be made on a case-by-case basis. The specific environment that a consumer is expected to work in must be evaluated by the counselor to ensure that the prospective employment meets the standards expressed in paragraphs 1 through 3 above. The counselor makes the determination of whether the employment meets the criteria as an employment outcome in a competitive-integrated setting.

6. The case record must contain narrative documentation to verify that the consumer is compensated at or above the minimum wage rate but not less than the customary wage and level of benefits provided by the same employer to non-disabled workers who perform the same or similar work and that the work setting/job placement meets the requirement of integrated.

This was developed over the past year and a half and discussed during several Council meetings. The need for this policy definition had been pointed out by the Review Committee from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Discussion followed.

Mike Fester will determine when this policy is to be implemented. Mr. McCampbell requested that 6 to 9 months after implementation, a report made to the Council about its application.

Policy on Immigrant Eligibility for Services:

The policy issue concerning immigrants was reviewed. It was stated:

To qualify for vocational rehabilitative services, a person must be legally eligible to seek employment because of their status as a citizen by birth, naturalized citizen or legally allowed to work.

Ruby Polk asked about psychological testing. It was clarified that psychological testing is used to help clients develop career plans that are uniquely appropriate for them and not for determining eligibility.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.